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SNAPSHOT

Irrigation System Saves Village

Decrepit irrigation infrastructure left Ghazni's agricultural community starved for water and exposed to seasonal flooding.

Photo : USAID/CDP/CADG

Two canals merge in a completed section of the Qalatee irrigation network.

USAID employed over 650 villagers to rehabilitate a critical irrigation network on the outskirts of the Ghazni provincial capital. When the project was completed, water returned for the first time in decades to Qalatee, an agriculture-dependent village home to over 15,000 residents.

"We had no water— none. When the rains came, the water would get trapped in the canal sediment or flood the village," recounts Mohammed Razik, a Qalatee elder. Located on the outskirts of the capital of Ghazni Province, Qalatee is a rural village of over 15,000 inhabitants who rely on agriculture and animal husbandry for sustenance and economic support.

For decades, the network of canals and wells that form Qalatee's irrigation infrastructure had steadily decayed to the extent that, by 2012, the system was incapable of delivering water to local crops or protecting homes from destructive floods. This created a disastrous situation, both agriculturally and economically, for the 3,000 families residing in the village. Razik explains, "We had to pay to use pumps to extract what little water we could from the blocked canals. The water was so dirty even the goats would not drink it. We grew very little."

In response to this problem, USAID collaborated with local government, village elders and over 650 Qalatee residents to overhaul area irrigation infrastructure. Renovations included the rehabilitation of 7.5 km of irrigation canals, repairs to 90 wells, and reconstruction of retaining walls, culverts, a check dam and a siphon. Residents also rebuilt a reservoir with 2,400 cubic meters. The project was a study in cooperation. Tractor owners donated the use of their vehicles, and property owners stored project equipment for free. Elders worked side by side with village laborers and arrived at worksites early each day to ensure the project was running smoothly.

Razik describes the project's impact: "Now, we can grow apples, grapes and peaches, as well as grass for our animals to graze." In addition to the agricultural benefits the system is delivering, its flood mitigation potential has also been proven. "It works!" - Razik exclaims, describing how the network successfully protected the village from the surging water and debris of a recent flood. "My grandfather and my father dreamed of being able to fix the canals and wells. Thanks to USAID, my generation was able to do this for the people," – adds Razik.